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NEWS RELEASE

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LEMHI COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$6.3 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Last year, Lemhi County residents and businesses received \$6.3 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 7,700 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Lemhi County ranks number 22 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$810 for every man, woman and child residing in Lemhi County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department distributed \$1.15 billion in Idaho communities in 2004. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Lemhi County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive. This money goes go to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment for adults and adolescents, improvements and operations at the local hospital, and dozens of other badly needed services."

“This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing,” adds Kurtz. “By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn’t just me pounding my chest. That’s what community leaders tell us.”

Lemhi County Commission Chairman Richard Snyder says, “It’s very important money. Lemhi County is not very wealthy. A lot of our residents are lower income. These people need help, so the (Department programs) are an investment in the county. Medicaid really helps. It takes pressure off our indigent fund.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$5.2 million on health care for residents of the county. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Rigby’s Pharmacy in Salmon. “It’s very important. Medicaid accounts for 40 percent of our profits,” says pharmacy owner Charlie Clark. “The other pharmacy in town closed last year. We wound up taking all the employees of the other pharmacy so they had jobs. (Medicaid) is definitely an investment. It’s important for the community. If we weren’t here, the nearest pharmacy is in Challis 60 miles away on a windy mountain road. If we lost Medicaid we would close our doors.”

The story is much the same at Steele Memorial Hospital. The hospital received \$174,000 in 2004 in extra Medicaid payments called Federal Upper Payment Limits and Disproportionate Share. The payments compensate hospitals for low Medicaid reimbursement. The money is in addition to regular inpatient and outpatient fees paid to the hospital and can be used for any purpose, so it has the potential to benefit anyone using the hospital, not just Medicaid clients. “The money we get helps us maintain our cash flows,” says Chief Financial Office Brian Mell. “It relieves the stress of paying our vendors and staying alive. We just moved into a new facility and it’s helped a lot. The (payments) are very important because we are the only hospital around for a two hour drive.” All Medicaid payments to the hospital totaled \$556,000.

Lemhi County residents received \$329,000 in Food Stamps to help feed their families and an additional \$85,000 for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program aimed at meeting nutrition needs. Food Stamp spending in Lemhi County was up \$50,000 from 2003 figures. The program served 377 people in 2004 — 70 more than in 2003.

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz adds, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. The dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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(**Editors:** Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director Tracey Sessions at 528-5791 for more information.)

**More information on Health & Welfare’s
investment in every Idaho County
can be found online at
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**